

CANADA VOTES 2025: STRENGTHEN HEALTH CARE

With an aging population there is a need for robust infrastructure to support an active and healthy retirement for aging Canadians. The next federal government can build that infrastructure with the provinces and territories by investing in access to health care, a national aging and seniors strategy, progress on pharmacare, and by ensuring strong leadership by a minister of older persons or seniors. It's good for Canadians, for our communities and the economy.

Access to health care

- Canadians are struggling to access the right care when they need it due to long ER wait times, a critical shortage of family doctors, ER closures overnight and on weekends, and hallway health care.
- Over 6.5 million Canadians lack a family doctor or nurse practitioner they see regularly, says the Canadian Medical Association (CMA).
- According to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) the number of direct care providers hasn't kept pace with the growth of the aging population, with declines since 2013. In 2022, there were 52 nurses in direct care roles per 1,000 older adults – down from 59 in 2013. Numbers also fell for family doctors (7.0 to 6.5) and specialists (6.2 to 5.6).
- In 2018, the CMA reported that Canada had just 304 geriatricians.
- As their needs evolve, older Canadians need a reliable health-care system and access to affordable medication. National pharmacare will improve access, outcomes, and affordability for all Canadians, without diminishing anyone's current coverage.
- Better access and use of prescription drugs would cut costs and lead to a healthier population. It would also allow for better monitoring of medications and reduce the burden on other parts of the health-care system.
- Canada's Pharmacare Act was an important first step toward universal pharmacare. Now federal, provincial and territorial government must work together to sustainably fund and fully implement national pharmacare – ensuring it works in harmony with existing public and private prescription drug programs, so that all Canadians can afford the medications they need, without diminishing anyone's current coverage.

Minister of older persons (seniors)

- In the last cabinet shuffle, the minister for seniors was left out of cabinet.
- This role is key to ensuring that all government decisions and policies are viewed through a seniors' lens. The next government must reinstate this position, so older persons have a voice at the cabinet table.

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National aging and seniors strategy

- Older adults represent the fastest growing segment of the population and Canada's population over 65 years projected to reach 11 million within two decades. Yet our health-care and social systems aren't ready, and we don't have a plan to ensure well-being as Canadians age.
 - Gaps in care, housing and social policies undermine older people's independence and choice, and their contributions in maintaining vibrant, healthy communities and economies.
 - In 2021, 475,000 people (1.6 per cent of the Canadian population) reported unmet home care needs – most were older people.
 - 1 in 4 Canadians is a caregiver and 1 in 2 will become a caregiver in their lifetime. Caregivers say they need broad financial support and 94 per cent say home care access needs to improve.
 - Nearly 1 in 3 older adults is at risk of social isolation. A quarter want to participate in more social activities, and 19 per cent felt a lack of companionship.
 - Ageism is linked with reduced lifespan, poverty and financial insecurity, poor health outcomes, and loss of self-esteem and confidence. It affects the economic and social well-being of older Canadians, but there is a lack of research on the issue in Canada.
 - Elder abuse affects up to 10 per cent of older adults in Canada, but only one in five incidents of elder abuse comes to the attention of those who can help.
- Canada needs action now by all levels of government to meet the growing and evolving needs of Canada's aging population – ensuring retirement income security, affordable and appropriate housing and transportation, age-friendly communities, and quality health care, including improved long-term, home and community care. With dedicated funding, clear goals and tangible outcomes, we can build an inclusive, age-just Canada where everyone can age with dignity.

Questions to candidates

- 1) Minister of older persons (seniors):** In the last federal cabinet shuffle, the government did not include a minister of seniors – an important position to ensure that government decisions and policies are viewed through a seniors' lens. Will your party appoint a minister of older persons or seniors with a mandate to protect the rights, dignity and inclusion of older Canadians, backed by sustained funding and authority?
 - Ideal response:
Yes, we will appoint a dedicated minister of older persons or seniors. A dedicated minister is an important role in cabinet as Canada ages.
- 2) Fixing health care:** What is your party's plan to address the health-care challenges in Canada?
 - Ideal response:
Our government would:
 - Build a stronger workforce so everyone can access the right kind of health care, in the right place, at the right time – including family doctors and primary care practitioners,

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home care and personal support workers, nurses and nurse practitioners, and other health-care professionals.

- Invest in age-friendly policies across the health-care system and strengthen health care so we meet older persons' evolving needs with timely, accessible care – helping all generations thrive in a healthier, more inclusive Canada.
- Implement national, universal, public pharmacare plan that works in harmony with existing public and private prescription drug programs, with long-term, sustainable funding.

3) National aging and seniors strategy: By 2030, 1 in 4 Canadians will be over the age of 65. The next federal government needs to set a long-term plan to support and promote a positive and healthy aging experience for all Canadians. It is good for Canadians, communities and the economy. Will your party commit to a national aging and seniors strategy?

- Ideal response:

Our government would work with the provinces and territories to lead a strategy that improves retirement income security, access to affordable and appropriate housing and transportation, age-friendly communities, tackles ageism, support caregivers, and ensures quality health care that includes improved long-term, home and community care. This means investing in age-friendly policies across sectors, including health care, housing, employment and digital access.

4) Pharmacare: Canada needs a national pharmacare plan that enhances the well-being of all Canadians without diminishing anyone's current coverage, working in harmony with existing public and private prescription drug programs. Will your party continue to work with the provinces and territories to implement national, universal, public pharmacare so that all Canadians have access to the medications they need?

- Ideal response:

Our government would continue to work with the provinces and territories to implement a national, universal pharmacare plan that works in harmony with existing public and private prescription drug programs, with long-term, sustainable funding.

ABOUT FEDERAL RETIREES The National Association of Federal Retirees (Federal Retirees) is the largest national advocacy organization representing active and retired members of the federal public service, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) and retired federally appointed judges, as well as their partners and survivors. With more than 170,000 members from coast to coast to coast, Retirees has advocated for improvements to the financial security, health and well-being of our members and all Canadians since 1963.

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